

## INFORMATION ABOUT WARFARIN (A BLOOD THINNER MEDICATION)

This handout is in four parts:

1. Basic Information
2. Side Effects to Watch For
3. Diet Information
4. How to Stay Safe

### BASIC INFORMATION

#### WHAT ARE SOME OF THE NAMES OF THE MEDICINE?

The generic name warfarin also has brand names – Coumadin® or Jantoven®.

#### WHY DO I NEED THIS MEDICINE?

**Warfarin** thins your blood to help keep harmful clots from forming or moving. It is an anticoagulant. “Anti” means against and “coagulant” means to thicken into a gel or solid. It helps make your blood flow easier and not make unwanted blood clots. If your blood is too thick and makes a clot, you could have a heart attack, stroke or other serious problem.

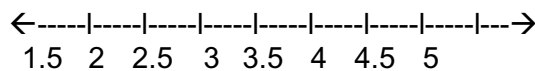
Your doctor or other health care provider has started you on warfarin for one of two reasons:

1. to prevent your body from making unwanted blood clots for
  - patients with an irregular heart rhythm called atrial fibrillation,
  - patients with an artificial heart valve,
  - patients with a blood clotting disorder
  - patients who have had recent surgery or injury that will keep them in bed.
2. to prevent an existing blood clot from getting bigger or moving to another part of your body for patients with a clot in their leg and/or in their lungs or other part of the body.

#### HOW DO I TAKE THE MEDICINE?

1. Your dose of warfarin depends on:
  - a blood test called “INR” (**I**nternational **N**ormalized **R**atio) and
  - your therapeutic INR range (one example is a range of 2.0 – 3.0)
2. Take this medicine just like your doctor tells you. Do not stop taking **warfarin** unless your doctor tells you to.

Your therapeutic INR range is \_\_\_\_\_.



**CLOTTING  
TOO FAST**

**CLOTTING  
TOO SLOW/BLEEDING**

**If your INR is too low, you might make an unwanted blood clot.  
If your INR is too high, you might be at risk for bleeding.**

3. If you do miss a dose, call your doctor. Do not take two doses at the same time.
4. Take **warfarin** at the same time each day.
5. You can take the medicine with or without food.

## **SIDE EFFECTS TO WATCH FOR**

### **HOW WILL I KNOW IF I HAVE THE RIGHT AMOUNT OF MEDICINE?**

You will have your blood tested often. The test shows how fast your blood clots. The doctor may change your dose to keep your blood within the therapeutic INR range.

Many things might cause the INR blood test to change:

- how much **warfarin** you are taking
- how much vitamin K you eat (in food and vitamins)
- how much alcohol you drink
- Other medicines (over-the-counter and prescription medications)
- If you are sick, have large changes in weight, or are more active.

### **WHAT COMMON SIDE EFFECTS OR PROBLEMS MAY I HAVE?**

**Warfarin** may cause you to bruise a little more easily. You may also notice slight bleeding from time to time such as:

- Gums bleeding while brushing teeth.
- Bleeding after a cut that stops within a few minutes.
- Menstrual bleeding that is a little heavier than normal
- More nosebleeds that stop quickly.

### **RARE SIDE EFFECTS INCLUDE:**

- An allergic reaction to warfarin, such as an itchy rash.
- Skin changes with red areas going to purple, becoming painful, and ending in skin death.
- Painful purple spots on toes.

**If you notice any of these, get medical help right away.**

### **ALSO, GET MEDICAL HELP RIGHT AWAY IF YOU HAVE:**

- Urine – red or brown
- Bowel movement (stool) - red or black, tarry
- Cough or Vomit (throw up) - coffee colored or bright red
- Severe pain, such as a headache or stomachache
- New bruises without being hurt
- A cut or any bleeding that doesn't stop in 20 minutes
- A serious fall or hit on the head (you might not see the bleeding)
- Dizziness or are very tired all the time
- A new skin rash that may or may not be painful
- Sudden change in vision
- Numbness or weakness on one side of your body

If you are planning to become pregnant, are already pregnant, or breastfeeding, tell your doctor immediately. Taking **warfarin** while pregnant can cause birth defects.

## DIET INFORMATION

While taking warfarin, the key is to keep the amount of Vitamin K in your diet the same from one day to the next. It is important to be consistent. Take the same number of servings a day.

**Increasing the amount of Vitamin K in your diet can decrease the effects of warfarin.**

**Decreasing the amount of Vitamin K in your diet can increase the effects of warfarin.**

These foods have high levels (limit to 1 serving a day)	These foods have medium levels (Limit to 3 servings a day)
Cooked Greens ½ cup (collard, turnip, beet, mustard)	Green cabbage ½ cup
Kale, cooked ½ cup	Brussel sprouts ½ cup
Spinach, raw 1 ½ cup cooked ½ cup	Broccoli, raw 1 cup Cooked ½ cup
Parsley, raw ¼ cup	Endive, Romaine and Green leaf lettuces 1 cup

## OTHER DIET INFORMATION:

- Avoid binge eating on any one fruit or vegetable.
- All green tea drinks do not contain the same amount of vitamin K. If you drink green tea, drink the same type (i.e. brewed or the same bottle brand), and drink it consistently.
- Avoid alcohol while taking warfarin – it can increase the effects of warfarin. If you do drink alcohol, limit the amount to 1-2 per day.  
One drink = Wine- 5 oz, Beer- 12 oz, Liquor- 1 ½ oz
- Avoid chewing tobacco; it is high in Vitamin K.
- Limit cranberries, cranberry juice and pomegranate seeds.
- Warfarin interacts with some supplements, vitamins, and herbal remedies.
- Liquid nutritional drinks (i.e. Boost®, Ensure®, Glucerna®, Slimfast®) contain vitamin K. Be consistent when drinking these products.

If you need more information to plan your vitamin K foods, ask to talk to a dietitian.

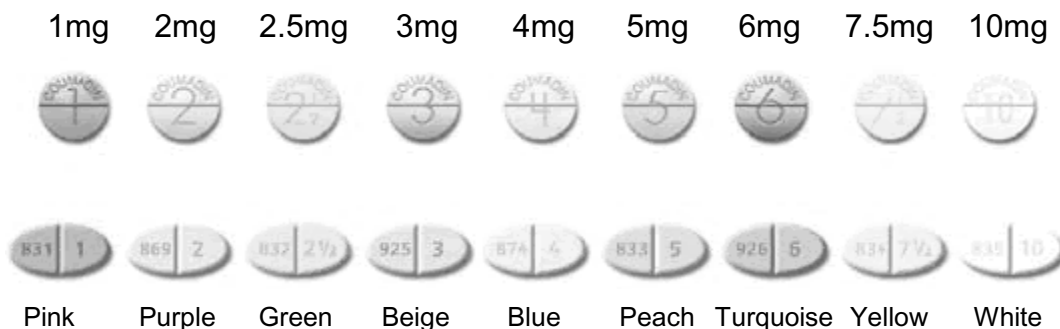
## HOW TO STAY SAFE

Taking warfarin doesn't mean you can't enjoy life. Exercise is important to your health. Be sure to take extra care with sharp objects like knives or scissors that could make you bleed. Wear protective equipment or consider changing from sports or activities that can cause injury.

Any medicine with Aspirin also can make keep your blood from clotting (thin). Medicines like Excedrin®, Ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®), Pepto Bismol®, Alka-Seltzer® and many other over-the counter medicines have Aspirin in them. If you need to take something for pain while on warfarin acetaminophen (Tylenol®) is one of the safest medicines. But it can also keep your blood from clotting so be sure to talk to your doctor about all medicines.

## WHAT CAN I DO?

- Take your pills at the same time every day.
- Use a pillbox to help you manage your medicines.
- Do not skip a dose of warfarin.
- Do not take extra doses.
- Do not share this medicine with anyone. Keep all medicine out of the reach of children.
- Talk to your health care provider (doctor)
  - When you have any medication changes
  - Before making big changes in your diet
  - If you feel sick or can't eat for more than two days
  - Before you have a procedure or surgery.
- Be sure to keep all your appointments so your blood can be tested regularly (every month)
- If you go to the dentist or any other doctor, tell them you are taking warfarin.
- Carry a card in your wallet or purse with a list of all your medicines.
- You might want to wear a medical alert bracelet or necklace to alert emergency workers that you take warfarin.
- When you buy new warfarin pills, make sure the color is the same as your old pills.



### References

1. Your Guide to Coumadin/Warfarin Therapy. Carla Huber, A.R.N.P., M.S., Cedar Rapids Community Anticoagulation Clinic, Cedar Rapids, Iowa under grant from the Agency of Healthcare Research and Quality.
2. Patient Information Booklet, Anticoagulation Clinic, Medical Services Center, University of Virginia Health System, Charlottesville, VA